

## **Texas A&M University Social Graduate Program**

The primary goal of our program is to assist in developing graduate students into productive, independent researchers who are likely to obtain post-doctoral positions or research-oriented faculty positions following graduation. The graduate program is designed to promote the progress of students as researchers in social and personality psychology, while maintaining sufficient flexibility to permit interdisciplinary and/or specialized training.

In graduate training, students are expected to (1) become actively involved in research; (2) complete program requirements; and (3) develop professionally.

### **Active Involvement in Research**

The core objective of the doctoral program is to train students as scientists. Students are expected to become actively involved in research with their primary mentor as soon as (or before) they begin graduate study. Scientific study is considered to be graduate students' primary focus, and therefore the bulk of time and effort throughout the year, including summers and winter break, should be devoted to conducting and disseminating research. Actively participating in research also means that graduate students are involved in the daily activities of their laboratory, including training and monitoring undergraduate students, designing studies, and any other activities that support the research functions of their lab.

Writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn, and critical to graduate study and obtaining academic jobs. Writing is best learned through an iterative process that involves feedback, and therefore students are also strongly encouraged to work with their advisor to begin writing up findings and ideas as soon as possible after starting the graduate program. Students are also expected to actively pursue opportunities to improve their writing productivity and skills (e.g., through university sponsored workshops, professional development series).

Students are encouraged to develop collaborations with multiple faculty members and other graduate students. This might mean attending lab meetings in the labs of other faculty or requesting meetings with other faculty to discuss research ideas. Students pursuing collaborations are expected to be the driving force in these projects and should actively reach out to faculty and other students to develop research ideas and studies.

Students are encouraged to apply for grants to support their research and training. Grant applications can be submitted to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and other places.

### **Program Requirements and Timelines**

#### **Courses**

Students are required to take 9 credit hours per semester, and are required to successfully complete the following courses:

Two department-level statistics courses (6 credits)

Six social psychology courses (18 credits; Theories of Social Psych, Advanced Methods in Social Psychology; plus at least four other classes)

Two psychology courses outside of social (6 credits)  
 Professional Seminar in Social Psychology (i.e., “brown bag”, 2 credits)  
 Grad student seminar (1 credit in the first semester of Year 1)

Students must discuss their class selections with their primary advisor each semester. This will aid students in selecting classes that are best suited for their career goals. The advisor may adjust these requirements (e.g., to ensure that the student registers for the appropriate number of total credits) and may require that the student take additional classes beyond the requirements outlined here. **The following is an example schedule of courses that would fulfill the requirements (due to faculty teaching schedules, students may need to modify this schedule in order to take social or out-of-area classes that coincide with their interests).**

### Sample schedule/timeline

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Fall	1) PSYC620 - Theories of Social Psy 2) PSYC607 – Experimental Psych 3) Grad student seminar (1) 4) PSYC670 - Professional Seminar (2)	1) Advanced Research Methods* 2) Social psych course (3) Research	1) Out-of-area course (3) Research	Research	Research
Spring	1) Social psych course (3) 2) PSYC671 - Exp Design Behav Scien 3) PSYC670 - Professional Seminar (2) 4) Research (1)	1) Social psych course (3) 2) Social psych course (3) Research	1) Out-of-area course (3) Research	Research	Research

\*It is also recommended that Advanced Methods in Social Psychology be taken in the first three years.

Social area courses include: Personality, Emotions/Affective Science, The Self, Cultural Psychology, Stereotypes & Prejudice, Self-Regulation, and Judgment and Decision Making. Additional courses might be offered as PSYC621s or PSYC689s based on faculty expertise and student interest.

In the above example schedule of courses, “Research” is taken as PSYC 685 or 691. Prior to the third year, students may take only 8 credits of PSYC 691. Students should take a total of 12 hours of 691 and 685 for the terminal master’s degree. Students can also register for the Professional Seminar in years 2-5 as needed. Students might also register for the department-level PSYC697 Teaching of Psychology.

At 9 hours per semester and 10 semesters, students will have 90 credit hours. Students should also register for some research hours in summer in order to fulfill the 96-hour PhD requirement. (Registration in summer is required for students obtaining summer funding.) For the PhD, 96 hours are needed. Many of these credits will be completed in research.

Students entering the program with a Master's degree may petition to have the class requirements reduced. However, the decision on class requirement reduction rests jointly with the advisor and the psychology department graduate coordinator.

### Other Program Requirements

\*\* Students are required to give one oral presentation each year in Professional Seminar

#### First Year:

- Students are required to meet with all social area faculty during their first semester, to learn about their research interests and projects. These meetings might foster additional collaborations, depending on the interests of the faculty member and the student.
- First-Year Project: Students are required by the Department to conduct a first year project, under the guidance of their primary advisor.
- Before beginning their second year of study (i.e., by the first day of Fall classes during their second year), students are required to write their first-year project in journal article form. Within one month of completing the paper, the student should set a meeting for discussion of faculty feedback on the paper. This meeting should include the student's advisor and the two other faculty members from the area. This, along with a committee meeting and other formalities required by Office of Graduate Studies, could serve as the basis for a terminal Master's when needed.
- First-year students with strong academic records are also encouraged to submit NSF fellowship applications during their first semester in the program. Students are required to work closely with their mentors to prepare their first-year projects for publication.

#### Second Year:

- Students present the findings of their first-year project at a department-wide poster presentation.

#### Third Year:

- Students are required to complete a major area paper (MAP) during their third year. See the MAP description at the end of this document for details on this requirement.

#### Fourth and Fifth Year:

- For the PhD defense, the student must, in discussion with the primary advisor, form a committee of four faculty members (one member of the four members should be from outside the department). A proposal meeting should occur in the Fall of the fourth or fifth year, and a defense meeting should occur during the Spring of the fourth or fifth year.

## **Professional Development**

Professional development requires becoming familiar with researchers and research being conducted in the department and in social/personality psychology. This can be accomplished by following the below recommendations.

- Professional memberships. Students are encouraged to join the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, as well as any societies relevant to their particular area of interest (often organizations to which your primary advisor belongs). As part of membership, students are also expected to keep up to date with society business and discussions, typically through listservs moderated by the society. Students are also expected to be familiar with the recent research reported in journals, by reading the top journals each month (e.g., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*).
- Conferences & other talks. Students should attend one or more professional conventions each year (e.g., Society for Personality and Social Psychology). At conferences, students will learn of current research before it appears in journals. They will also have the opportunity to meet colleagues from other universities. Students are expected to give oral and poster presentations at these conferences. Students are also expected to attend weekly brownbag presentations in the social area, all talks in the department or university by social/personality psychologists from other universities, and student meetings related to social/personality psychology or with visiting social psychologists.
- Preparing for job market expectations. Early in their graduate training, students are strongly encouraged to identify the current expectations in the job market for their area. They should review vitas of current and recent applicants for academic positions to identify the quantity and quality of publications that are considered competitive for the current job market. Students should also work to create their own vita as soon as possible after beginning the program and update it regularly. Students should also seek out and attend department-level and university-level training opportunities related to professional development.

## Progress Reports

To provide structure and accountability, all students are required to submit the following to their advisor by April 15 of each year: an updated vita along with statement outlining their research accomplishments, academic progress (GPA, degree plan), and their goals for the coming year. The student should submit, along with these materials, the names of two social area faculty members (not including his/her primary advisor) who can best evaluate his/her progress. The two faculty members selected by the student may differ from year to year; the two faculty members selected by the student in his/her third year will likely form the in-area component of the student's dissertation committee. These materials will provide the basis for the student's annual evaluation letter, which will be written by the student's advisor in consultation with the two additional faculty members selected by the student, with additional input provided by the social area faculty.

During the first year, the faculty in the social program will review each student after each semester and provide written feedback indicating the student's progress in the program (i.e., satisfactory vs. unsatisfactory). In all years, the faculty will review each student after the Spring semester. Satisfactory progress will be evaluated based on research productivity, grades, teaching, and fulfilling professional

obligations. Students will receive the yearly evaluation letter on or before May 31, and first year students will receive their initial evaluation letter on or before December 31.

If a student is making unsatisfactory progress, the faculty will request specific actions that need to be taken by the student in order to make satisfactory progress and maintain good standing in the program. A student whose review indicates unsatisfactory progress will be on probation for one semester, during which s/he is expected to remedy the problems noted by the faculty. Lack of satisfactory progress after one semester of probation may result in loss of access to departmental resources (i.e., Teaching Assistantships, Diversity or Merit Fellowships) or a recommendation of removal from the program.

## Third Year Major Area Paper for the Social Psychology Graduate Program

**Background:** The primary objective of the Social Psychology graduate training program at Texas A&M University is to produce researchers who are able to make substantial empirical and theoretical contributions to the science of social psychology. The social area faculty appreciates the breadth of this sub-discipline and understands that graduate students have different training goals and skill sets. The reality of this diversity informs the policy for the Third Year Major Area Paper (MAP) to satisfy University and Department requirements that students in all areas complete a written and oral preliminary exam during their third year.

**Objective:** The goal of the MAP is to provide graduate students an opportunity to enhance their training by producing a written document and oral defense of that document to broaden and deepen their expertise in social psychology. In consultation with the primary advisor, the student will select one of the options listed below to satisfy the MAP requirement. Regardless of which option is selected, the MAP should reflect a deep understanding of the relevant theoretical and empirical issues in social psychology. For example, any proposed study should be consistent with currently evolving best-practice recommendations for the field. Likewise, any theoretical review should be informed by a comprehensive understanding of existing theories and previous empirical research.

**Implementation:** In consultation with the primary advisor, the student will select two additional faculty members to form a three-person Guidance Committee (GC). The GC may include 1 faculty member who is not primarily affiliated with the Social Area if deemed appropriate by the primary advisor. The GC will approve the MAP proposal (a short 2 to 5 page document described below) and timelines during an initial proposal meeting to be scheduled between the end of Spring semester of the student's second year and September 1<sup>st</sup> of the student's third year. The student will then independently complete the MAP with guidance from her/his primary advisor. On a tentative date approved at the initial proposal meeting, a defense meeting will be held. During this meeting, the student will provide an oral defense of the project and the GC will evaluate the final project. The GC is responsible for monitoring compliance with timelines and providing written feedback on performance including required revisions of the project. In some cases, the GC will outline steps for remediation when the final product is judged unacceptable. Adherence to proposed timelines is a factor in the final evaluation. Thus, students will be strongly encouraged to propose realistic timelines. The typical timeline for these projects is between 3 to 4 months with a maximum time limit of 6 months.

**Nature of the Project:** Students have five tracks that can be used to satisfy this requirement. Students should select the option that is most appropriate for their training goals and needs in conjunction with their primary advisor. Additional faculty members could be consulted as needed.

**Option 1: Grant Proposal.** This option is designed to give students an opportunity to develop a grant proposal of the sort required by NIH Predoctoral Research Fellowships or NSF Dissertation Improvement Grants. The topic of the grant proposal must align with current funding and scientific priorities. *Nature of Proposal:* Students will prepare a short document outlining the nature of the grant proposal, rationale for the proposed research, timelines for the MAP, and statement of how this option fits well with her/his training objectives. The GC will evaluate the merit and scope of the proposed project as well as the feasibility of the timelines. *Nature of Final Written Product:* Students will produce an actual grant proposal that could be submitted to an agency for funding detailing studies that could be conducted at Texas A&M during the remainder of the time in graduate school. *Nature of Oral Defense:* Students will summarize the research problem, potential significance, and empirical approach as outlined in the proposal.

**Option 2: Meta-Analysis.** This option is designed to give students an opportunity to quantitatively summarize a literature of their choice. The specific topic should relate to the student's research area and training goals. The meta-analysis could serve as a springboard for future dissertation research. *Nature of Proposal:* Students will prepare a short document outlining the research question, importance of the question, justification for the meta-analysis, and approximate number of available studies. The proposal will detail literature search parameters (e.g., published literature only versus a more exhaustive attempt to deal with publication bias) and general analytic approach (e.g., the application of a fixed-effect [common effect] or random-effects model). The proposal will also specify timelines for the MAP, and state how this option fits well with the student's training objectives. The GC will evaluate the merit and scope of the proposed meta-analysis including anticipated length of the final product as well as the feasibility of the timelines. *Nature of Final Written Product:* Students will produce a final manuscript that could be submitted for publication with additional revision and expansion. This work could inform additional dissertation research. *Nature of Oral Defense:* Students will summarize the approach and findings of the meta-analysis and outline specific future studies to address gaps in the literature. The student may also outline the steps needed to make the meta-analysis publishable.

**Option 3: Integrative Theoretical Review.** This option is designed to give students an opportunity to develop a theoretical review paper of the sort published in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* or *Psychological Review*. The specific topic should broadly integrate theory and research in social psychology. The final product should serve as a springboard for future empirical research. *Nature of Proposal:* Students will prepare a short document outlining the topic area, importance of the area, and justification for their qualitative review and theoretical integration. The proposal will detail the scope of the literature review and outline the nature of the final written product. The proposal will also specify timelines for the MAP, and state how this option fits well with the student's training objectives. The GC will evaluate the merit and scope of the proposed review as well as the feasibility of the timelines. *Nature of Final Written Product:* Students will produce a final manuscript that could be submitted for publication with additional revision and expansion. This work could form the basis of future dissertation research. *Nature of Oral Defense:* Students will summarize their integrative review and outline specific future studies to address gaps in the literature. The student may also outline the steps needed to make their work publishable.

**Option 4: Expanded Foundation for Dissertation Research.** This option is designed to give students an opportunity to identify a research topic and outline a series of studies that could serve as the foundation for a large-scale and exceptional dissertation. This document will ideally culminate in a programmatic series of studies that make major contributions to social psychology of the sort published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* or other top-tier outlets. *Nature of Proposal:* Students will prepare a short document outlining the research area, importance of the topic, and tentative scope of the empirical work (e.g., number of studies, general design of studies). The proposal will specify timelines for the MAP, outline the nature of the final document, and state how this option fits well with the student's training objectives. The GC will evaluate the merit and scope of the proposed studies as well as the feasibility of the timelines. *Nature of Final Written Product:* Students will produce a final manuscript that should serve as the foundation for the dissertation and provide a template for future empirical research. The written product could emphasize theoretical issues or focus on more concrete methodological details as outlined in the proposal approved by the GC. Regardless, the point of the option is to provide students with a foundation to conduct dissertation research that represents the highest quality science. *Nature of Oral Defense:* Students will summarize

the research area, importance of the topic, and outline their proposed approach for making major empirical contributions to this topic.

**Option 5: Ready to Defend First Author Manuscript.** In exceptional cases, a student may be able to fulfill the MAP requirement with a high-quality, first-authored manuscript. If the student has a completed first author manuscript they intend to submit to a top-tier outlet (e.g., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*), they may potentially use this paper as their MAP. This manuscript should report either a series of programmatic studies or studies that are particularly ambitious. Under most circumstances, the manuscript should be completed by the end of the second year. *Nature of Proposal:* After gaining approval from their advisor, students must provide committee members with a 1-3 page document attesting to the ambitious nature of the manuscript, its novelty, and its significance for social psychology at least 2 weeks in advance of claiming eligibility for this option. If all committee members agree that the project is eligible for consideration (this can be done over e-mail and does not necessarily require a meeting), the student is free to schedule the defense. *Nature of Final Written Product:* Students will provide their ready-to-submit manuscript to their committee. *Nature of Oral Defense:* Students will summarize the research area, importance of the topic, and the reported results. The student may also outline future studies that build on the manuscript. The oral defense will include questions pertinent to the major area, but is not limited to the specific research questions addressed in the manuscript. To pass this option, committee members must agree that the manuscript has a reasonable chance at publication at a top-tier outlet. If the manuscript does not meet this requirement, students must still complete one of the other four MAP options before the September 1st deadline.

**Procedural Notes for Proposal Meeting:** Students are required to give GC members at least 2 weeks to review the written proposal before the Proposal Meeting. The Proposal Meeting should last approximately 1 hour. There are three outcomes of the proposal meeting - Approve, Conditionally Approved, or Not Approved.

- *Approved* proposals are ready to go with only minor modifications (e.g., adjustments in timelines, slight deviations of scope). This outcome is roughly analogous to an “accept” or “accept with conditions” decision on a manuscript. The student is expected to make any and all minor modifications to the MAP agreed upon during the meeting.
- *Conditionally Approved* proposals need some revision and modification but these can be made in conjunction with the primary advisor. Members of the GC could request an opportunity to review the proposed changes or leave the changes at the discretion of the primary advisor. This outcome is roughly analogous to a positive “revise and resubmit” decision on a manuscript.
- *Not Approved* proposals are not suitable for fulfilling the objectives of the MAP. Thus, students will need to produce a new proposal. This outcome is analogous to a “reject” decision on a manuscript. In the event that a proposal is not approved, the student must submit a new or substantially revised proposal within 30 days.

**Procedural Notes for Project Defense:** Students are required to give GC members at least 2 weeks to review the final written document before the Oral Defense meeting. At the start of the defense, the student will be excused so that the GC can identify any fatal flaws that would prevent the oral defense from proceeding. At the end of the defense, the student will be excused so the GC can evaluate the project and reach a summary decision. The primary mentor is responsible for summarizing this feedback in writing to the student. There are three outcomes of the defense - Approve, Revise, or Reject.

- *Approved* projects are judged to have satisfied the objectives of the MAP. Minor editorial corrects are permitted for typos or blemishes in writing. No substantive revisions are necessary.
- Projects needing *Revision* require some degree of modification to satisfy the objectives of the MAP. Depending on the scope of the revisions, a second GC meeting might be required. In other cases, the primary advisor can handle the revisions. The student will receive explicit written recommendations for revisions as well as a timeline for completing revisions. Students who do not complete revisions under the stipulated timelines may have their project summarily rejected. The ideal timeline for revision is between 1 and 2 months.
- *Rejected* projects have been deemed to be fatally flawed because they substantially deviated from the proposal or because they were so poorly executed that the GC did not believe there was a strong enough basis for revision within a 1 to 2 month timeline. Students who have their projects rejected have 6 months to repeat the entire MAP process with a new proposal, new GC, new written document, and new oral defense. This outcome is expected to be very rare and should prompt the student to strongly evaluate any decision to continue to pursue a PhD degree at Texas A & M University.

**Policy on Extensions:** Significant departures from these deadlines (e.g., more than a few days in the case of a temporary illness or personal emergency) are not normally allowed. Students who cannot meet their deadlines are encouraged to consult with their advisor and the Social Area Head and to follow university procedures for requesting a formal Leave of Absence.